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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUCCESS STORY

The Democratic Local Governance Project in Colombia



Photo: ARD, Inc.

Local Indigenous Council Debates How to Proceed with an SIP-funded Project.

"More than just improving relations between the community and the local administration, the USAID Democracy and Local Governance Program (has) provided an ideal platform for the community to become involved in democratic processes and work side by side with public officials."

Helver Gonzales Mora
Mayor of Ataco, Tolima



Photo: ARD, Inc.

Indigenous Workers Take a Break on an SIP-funded Project.

In February 2006, the USAID Democratic Local Governance Program (DLGP) concluded five years of important work: improving and strengthening *local government* to make it more responsive and accountable to local communities. USAID/Colombia contracted ARD, Inc. to develop an innovative approach using a variety of concepts and tools to strengthen local governance. By 2001, technical and financial assistance for 200 municipalities had been launched in eight regions of the country. Assistance under the Democratic Local Governance Program (DLGP) had four major objectives:

- Improve Citizen Participation,
- Strengthen Municipal Management
- Expand Social Infrastructure
- Improve Transparency/Accountability at the Local Level.

From the outset, Social Infrastructure Fund (SIF) projects formed the heart of the Program. Similar to Depression-era Public Works Programs, these focused on practical remedies to basic priority needs in local communities. Rapid, visible results helped to rebuild citizen confidence in government through social infrastructure projects. These projects involved local communities in every phase from the definition-of-need through completion. The experience of having a hands-on role in designing, developing, planning, implementing and overseeing public works projects bolstered citizen confidence in local government in a meaningful way.

Projects re-engaged local citizens in the vital functions of democracy, assuring them an active voice in the expenditure of resources. Under the program, government representatives were encouraged to act responsibly, accountably and transparently for the benefit of all.

The Social Infrastructure Fund process also provided invaluable training to citizens, offering them the opportunity to gain first-hand experience in the development, implementation and oversight of publicly-funded projects. It successfully involved vulnerable marginalized communities, including indigenous groups, Afro-Colombians, displaced persons, and women. Over the course of the Democratic Local Governance Program, 270 social infrastructure projects were successfully implemented, with USD \$7 million contributed in local matching funds.

The program helped to reestablish the legitimate power and presence of the Colombian state, and has re-energized commitment and enthusiasm as citizens participate in decision-making. The more accountable and transparent municipal governments become, the greater their credibility with citizens. A municipal Councilwoman from Cáceres, Alcira Peralte, said of her overall experience: "In our municipality we did not have a tax code. With the support of USAID and ARD, we developed a tax code, increased revenues, and improved financial management. The knowledge gained by the municipal council allows us to better control municipal finances."

Telling Our Story

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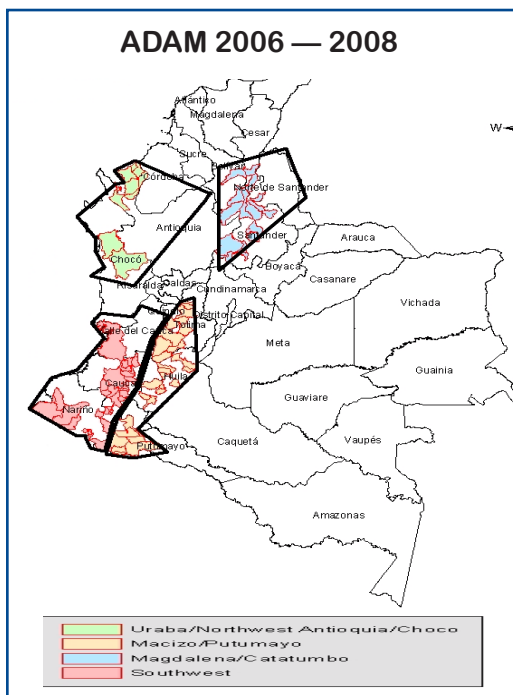
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Photo: ARD, Inc.

Delegates to the First Institutional Strengthening Conference of Afro-Colombian Leaders Learn About the Democratic Local Governance Program.



Map: Diana Bustamante, USAID/Colombia

ADAM

The five years of projects mounted under the Democratic Local Governance Program were highly successful. In a needed strategy adjustment, USAID/Colombia and the Government of Colombia have agreed to continue these types of activities under a targeted geographic program called **ADAM** (*Areas de Desarrollo Alternativo Municipal*) Areas of Municipal Alternative Development). In projections for the next five years, (provided funding approval by Congress) **ADAM** will target 94 municipalities in four different regions (see map in sidebar). USAID and the Government of Colombia worked together closely to select appropriate regions and municipalities to implement activities.

Under **ADAM**, local government and alternative development projects will focus on areas that:

- a) Are under coca/poppy cultivation or vulnerable to the threat
- b) Have significant economic potential
- c) Have sufficient local political will, and
- d) Have a high incidence of conflict.

Long-term objectives under ADAM are:

- Multiply program synergies to increase effectiveness
- Create lasting sustainability
- Deliver greater overall value for the long-term.



Photo: ARD, Inc.

Workmen Build a Potable Water Line Through Rocky Terrain